

The Night Preceding ‘Ashura

The night that preceded ‘Ashura was the hardest on the hearts of the family that descended from the Messenger of Allah (S). It was filled with unpleasant things and with calamities. It followed evil and was filled with presentiments of imminent dangers.

The Banu Umayyah had cut them off from all necessities of life. Women were wailing; children were crying on account of the acute thirst, and dark agony was looming in the air.

But what was the condition of the men who sought glory, the companions of Husayn (‘a), the honourable men who descended from Hashim, with regard to such calamities? Were they left with any strength at all whereby they could stand on their feet?

Did they have any morale to lift them and to empower them to struggle for survival, knowing that the war would most surely take place the next day?

Yes! The valiant ones from Abu Talib's family, as well as the elite from among the Imam's followers, were most ecstatic! They were firmer in their determination to fight to the last drop of their blood than any time before!

They were elated on account of the divine bliss and happiness awaiting them! Whenever the bad situation worsened, they even smiled more, teased one another, became happier and more rejuvenated.

Since at Ninawa they opted for death
Seeing some marks for treachery
This one smiled, that laughed
In happiness and in ecstasy
Though death never wears a smile.

Burayr joked with ‘Abdul-Rahman al-Ansari, whereupon the latter said, “Is this the time for indolence?!” Burayr said, “My people know very well that I never liked indolence in any phase of my life, but I am in

high spirits on account of what we will be receiving [of Allah's rewards]. By Allah!

The only barrier between us and the *huris* with large lovely eyes is that these folks assault us with their swords! I sincerely wish they do so this very moment!"¹

Habib Ibn Muzahir came out of his tent wearing a big smile. Yazid Ibn al-Hasin al-Hamdani said to him, "This is not the time to smile about anything." Habib said to him, "On the contrary: what other time is more worthy of smiling?! As soon as these folks attack us with their swords, we will find ourselves embracing the *Huris*!"²

Glory leaves on their faces its marks
In contentment, though the faces of the valiant
Are in fright constrained.
Like moons shining in the darkest of night
As they appear on their steeds riding,
So they raced like bleeding to meet their death,
As if in death lies their very ecstasy
Their souls embraced their swords
Then the embracing was in the Garden for the *huris*.³

They remained quite energetic, alternating between a deep involvement in acts of adoration and the readying of their weapons for the fight, as if they were bees in a bee-hive in the noise of their commotion!

Some were standing in prayers while others were sitting or bowing. One of them, al-Dahhak Ibn 'Abdullah al-Mashriqi, said, "A regiment of cavaliers belonging to Ibn Sa'd passed by us, and one of their men heard al-Husayn ('a) reciting the verse saying,

'Let not those who disbelieve think that Our granting them respite is better for their souls; We grant them a respite only so that they may add to their sins, and they shall have a disgraceful chastisement. On no account will Allah leave the believers in the condition in which you are till He distinguishes the evil [doers] from [the doers of] good' (Qur'an, 3: 178-179).

That man commented saying, 'We, by the Lord of the Ka'ba, are the doers of good; He has distinguished us from you.' Burayr said to him, 'O man of debauchery! Shall Allah really count you among the doers of good?!

Come to our camp and repent your great sins, for by Allah, we are the good ones while you are the bad ones.' The man [citing a verse from the Holy Qur'an] said sarcastically to him, 'And I am a witness to that!'"⁴

It is reported that on that same night, as many as thirty-two men defected from the camp of Ibn Sa'd and joined al-Husayn's camp⁵ after having seen how the latter were supplicating and praying, demonstrating the most sincere devotion and submission to Allah Almighty.

‘Ali Ibn al-Husayn (‘a) has said, “I heard my father on the night preceding the day on which he was killed saying, as he was mending his sword,

O Time! Fie upon you for a friend!
How many do you have, at dawn and at dusk
Of friends and of vengeance seekers,
While Time with a substitute is never pleased?
But the affair is with the Mighty One
And every living being will go his way.

“He repeated them twice or thrice; therefore, I understood his implication, so I was overcome with tears, yet I remained silent, knowing that fate was near. As for my aunt, Zainab (‘a), once she heard those verses, she leaped and went to see him.

She said to him, ‘Woe unto me! Shall I survive you?! I wish death had deprived me of life! My mother, Fatima (‘a), has just died followed by my father ‘Ali (‘a) then my brother al-Hasan (‘a)!⁶ O vicar of the past generations and the best remnant of those that remain!’ Al-Husayn (‘a) consoled her and admonished her to persevere, telling her,

‘O sister! May Allah console you! Be informed that earthlings die, and that even those who live in the heavens do not live forever. Everything shall perish except His countenance; my consolation, and that of every Muslim, is that the Messenger of Allah (S) is our best example.’

She, peace be upon her, said to him, ‘Do you force yourself on it? This causes my heart to swell even more, and it surely is harder on my soul.’⁷

The women wept when they saw her weeping, beating their cheeks. Umm Kulthum cried out, ‘O Muhammad! O ‘Ali ! O mother! O Husayn! How lost we are after you!’ Al-Husayn (‘a) said, ‘O sister! O Umm Kulthum! O Fatima! O Rubab! Pay attention to me. Once I am killed, you should not tear your pockets nor scotch your cheeks nor utter any verbal abuse.’⁸

Then al-Husayn (‘a) instructed his sister, Zainab, to refer to ‘Ali Ibn al-Husayn (‘a) with regard to any *ahkam* and to convey the same to the Shi’as as a measure to protect the new Imam.”

Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim testifies to the authenticity of the above; he has said,

“I visited Hakima daughter of Muhammad son of [Imam] ‘Ali al-Riḍā (‘a) and sister of [Imam] Abul-

Hasan al-'Askari ('a) in 282 A.H (895 A.D.) in Medina, and I spoke to her from behind a curtain.

I asked her about her religion, so she named the Imams whom she emulated, naming one of the sons of [Imam] al-Hasan ('a). I asked her whether she was emulating them due to her observation or on account of what is reported on their behalf. She said, "By way of what is transmitted by Abu Muhammad who recorded it for his mother."

I asked her, "Should I emulate one who instructs a woman?!" She said, "It is emulating al-Husayn Ibn 'Ali in Abu Talib ('a) who instructed his sister Zainab in the open;" so I realized that anything which was being attributed to Zainab was done only to protect the identity of 'Ali Ibn al-Husayn ('a).

Then she said, "You are people who record what goes on. Have you not reported saying that the ninth from among the offspring of al-Husayn ('a) shall distribute his estate during his own lifetime?"

She was actually referring to p. 275, chapter 49, first edition of as-Saduq's book *Ikmal ad-Din wa Itmam al-Ni'ma*.

Then the Imam ('a) ordered the tents to be pitched beside one another so that they would be able to face the enemy from one direction. He also ordered a ditch to be dug behind them and to be filled with firewood which was then lit so that the enemy's horses would not attack from that direction. Fighting, hence, would be confined to one front.[9](#)

He, peace be upon him, went out in the depth of the night outside the tents in order to inspect the hills and plateaus and to find out whether there was anyone lying in ambush for them, or a place from which the cavalry might attack.

Then he, peace be upon him, returned holding the hand of Nafi' as he was saying, "This is it, by Allah, a promise which can never be broken." Then he said to him, "Why don't you make your way between both of these mountains and save yourself?" Nafi' fell down kissing the Imam's feet and saying, "May my mother lose me!

I bought my sword for a thousand [dinars] and my horse for the same; by Allah Who has blessed me with your company, I shall never abandon you even if they both are exhausted because of my attacks and retreats."

Then al-Husayn ('a) entered Zainab's tent as Nafi' remained outside it on guard waiting for al-Husayn ('a) to come out.

He heard Zainab saying to him, "Have you verified the intentions of your companions? I fear lest they should abandon you once the attack starts." He said to her, "By Allah! I have done so and found them brave and valiant, friends who are more eager to die for me than an infant for his mother's milk."

Nafi' said, "When I heard him say so, I wept and went to see Habib Ibn Muzahir to tell him what I overheard of the dialogue between him [al-Husayn] and his sister Zainab."

Habib Ibn Muzahir said, "By Allah!

Had I not have to wait for his orders, I would have attacked them this very night. I have left him with his sister, and I think the women are terrified. I shared their feeling of depression; so, could you please gather your companions and say something nice to these ladies?" Habib then stood up and shouted, "O men of zeal! O lions!"

They rushed from their tents like fierce lions. To Banu Hashim he said, "Go back to your places; may your eyes never be deprived of sleep." Then he turned to his fellows and narrated to them what he and Nafi' had witnessed and heard.

They all said, "By Allah Who has blessed us with such a stand! Had we not been waiting for Husayn's orders, we would have hurried this very minute to attack; so, calm yourself and cool your eyes." Al-Husayn ('a) supplicated to Allah to reward them with goodness.

Then he said, "Let us all go to see the ladies to comfort them." Habib accompanied him together with his companions. They shouted out, "O honourable ladies of the Messenger of Allah! Here are the swords of your slaves who have vowed never to thrust them except in the necks of anyone who wishes to harm you!

Here are the lances of your slaves who have sworn never to plant them except in the chests of whoever terrorizes your quarters!" Hearing them, the women came out crying and wailing and said, "O men of goodness! Please do protect the daughters of the Messenger of Allah and the ladies of the Commander of the Faithful!" Everyone cried, so much so that the earth seemed to get dizzy...[10](#)

In the predawn of the same night, al-Husayn ('a) dozed off for a short while then woke up and informed his companions that he saw in a vision dogs charging at him and mauling him, the most fierce among them being a spotted one, and that the one who would kill him from among those men would be leprous.

In another vision he saw the Messenger of Allah (S) accompanied by a group of his companions and was saying to him, "You are this nation's Martyr, and those in the heavens have congratulated each other on account of your martyrdom, and so have those who occupy the High Plane.

Let your breakfast be with me, and do not be late, for here is an angel who has descended from the heavens in order to take your blood in a green glass vase."[11](#)

Subdued by thirst became the defender of the *Shari'a*
Never could he wet his palate with the Euphrates water,

Becoming a target for Banu Umayyah's arrows,
 Till he was spent thirsty on the battlefield,
 As he was sought by every spear.
 The steeds of the people of *shirk* on his ribs trampled
 In haste, turning, making around him circles,
 Just as wise ladies of Ahmad who
 Never left their chambers became
 Assaulted by the steeds even in their own homes.
 How many hearts were frightened,
 The hearts of those about whose veils
 The foes disputed with one another?
 How many were the orphans who were terrified to see
 How their protector to the ground did fall,
 How they lost their head-covering in their fright,
 How they fell upon al-Husayn's corpse
 With broken hearts,
 About to melt by their very sighs,
 Falling upon his body and his neck with cries,
 To their tears responded their eyes,
 Tasting the pain of the whips...?
 So they call upon their people's defenders...
 But where are the defenders since at *Taff*
 Their blood spilled by Umayyah's swords and spears?
 Where are the protectors? Here are their sons
 Slaughtered, thirsty, lying on the sands.
 Where are the protectors and here are your girls
 Carried on the humps by their own foes?
 Despite their creed were they carried away
 Having lost those who would protect them.
 Tearful, repeating in agony their sighs
 So who, after Ahmad, shall console Fatima
 About her sons being killed
 And about her daughters taken captive?[12](#)

[1.](#) al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 241.

[2.](#) al-Kashshi, Rijal, p. 53 (Indian edition).

[3.](#) Excerpted from a poem by the 'Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Kishwan, may Allah have mercy on his soul.

[4.](#) al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 240, First Edition.

[5.](#) Ibn Nama, Al-Luhuf. al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh, Vol. 2, p. 217, Najafi edition. al-Thahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', Vol. 3, p. 210.

[6.](#) al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 4, p. 240. Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kamil, Vol. 4, p. 24. Al-Khawarizmi, Maqatal al-Husayn, Vol. 1, p. 238, Chapter 11. Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 45, Iranian edition.

[7.](#) Ibn Nama, Al-Luhuf.

[8.](#) al-Mufid, Al-Irshad.

[9.](#) al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 240.

[10.](#) Muhammad Jawad Shubbar, Al-Dam'a al-Sakiba, p. 325. The name of Hilal Ibn Nafi' is mentioned twice in his statement, which is an error. It is confirmed that the name is Nafi' Ibn Hilal, as recorded in the ziyarat of the area, al-Tabari's Tarikh, and Ibn al-Athir's Al-Kamil.

[11.](#) Shaikh 'Abbas al-Qummi, Nafs al-Mahmum, p. 125, where Imam as-Sadiq ('a) is quoted.

[12.](#) This poem by the Islamic authority, Ayatullah Shaikh Hadi Al Kashif al-Ghiṭā', may Allah sanctify him, is recorded on p. 62 of Al-Maqula al-Husayniyya.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/maqtal-al-husayn-sayyid-abd-al-razzaq-al-muqarram/night-preceeding-ash-ura#comment-0>